



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Introduction

**Citation for published version:**

Gleghorn, C & Gilbert, H 2014, Introduction: Recasting spectacle and commodity in the indigenous Americas. in C Gleghorn & H Gilbert (eds), *Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas*. Institute of Latin American Studies, School of Advanced Study, London, London, pp. 1-18.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



## Introduction: Recasting commodity and spectacle in the indigenous Americas

*Helen Gilbert and Charlotte Gleghorn*

In her 1974 poem ‘Hoop Dancer’, the late Native American writer Paula Gunn Allen (1939–2008) lyrically describes the ways in which embodied practices and kinaesthetic knowledge connect with ceremonial time:

It's hard to enter  
circling clockwise and counter  
clockwise moving no  
regard for time, metrics  
irrelevant to this dance  
where pain is the prime number  
and soft stepping feet  
praise water from the skies:  
I have seen the face of triumph  
the winding line stare down all moves  
to desecration: guts not cut from arms,  
fingers joined to minds,  
together Sky and Water  
one dancing        one  
circle of a thousand turning lines  
beyond the march of gears—  
out of time,        out of  
time, out  
of time (1997, p. 146).<sup>1</sup>

For Gunn Allen, ‘dancing in the midst of turning, whirling hoops is a means of transcending the limits of chronological time’. Despite the ravages of colonialism, possibilities for cultural renewal are imminent in this extended performative moment: ‘the hoop dancer dances within what encircles him, demonstrating how the people live in motion within the circling spirals of time and space’ (1986, p. 150).

1 Published in her 1997 collection, *Life is a Fatal Disease*.

When she cast the hoop dance as a poetic emblem of indigenous<sup>2</sup> temporality in action, Gunn Allen could scarcely have foreseen the growth of this art form as a pan-tribal expression of Native North American culture – or that it would also come to vitalise (and apparently indigenise) elite entertainments produced primarily for non-Native audiences. In recent decades, hoop dance has featured not only in small-town powwow and rodeo circuits but also at the Calgary Stampede, at globally televised mega-events such as the Atlanta and Vancouver Olympics and, since 2010, in the grand marquee that stages Cirque du Soleil's signature touring show, *Totem*, a spectacularised vision of human evolution billed as being 'somewhere between science and legend'.<sup>3</sup> On the internet are numerous video-clips of such performances, eliciting appreciative comments from cyber-audiences in many parts of the world. In their e-profiles alongside lists of local and national tournaments where they have triumphed, hoop dance champions boast international appearances in European, Asian and Latin American cities and sometimes include contact portals for anyone looking to commission their work. Thus, on the surface at least, the recent history of this dance form would seem to exemplify the workings of both spectacle and commodity as particularly powerful forces on indigenous cultures in our times.

This book's cover image of world champion hoop dancer Alex Wells, from the Lil'wat Nation in British Columbia, indexes the challenges involved in analysing such forces as part of (rather than external to) the cultural forms and practices through which particular aspects of indigeneity are expressed. In the photograph, the performer cuts a luminous figure against the stormy sky, conveying not only the dynamism of his art and the corporeal skill and flair involved in its execution, but also, potentially, a dramatic touch of Otherness. His striking pose and regalia draw our attention even as – or indeed if – we resist the lenses of exoticism that work to register the performance as an embodiment of cultural alterity. Behind this image there is another story, however, one which refutes the presumption that the indigenous performer is *always already* staging a spectacle for the Western gaze. Alex Wells, who began dancing as a young boy, finds in his art a vehicle to tell stories, to keep fit, and to celebrate the virtues and vitality of Native cultures. Hoop dancing, in his

- 2 In various parts of this collection, indigenous and indigeneity may appear in upper or lower case, attesting to the changing uses of, and claims upon, the terms. Some authors specifically address this issue, making a distinction between a political identity and a general concept, and have asked that we retain their capitalisation. In other instances, we have opted for lower case, according to house style.
- 3 *Totem*, 'About the Show', online at [www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/totem/show/about.aspx](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/totem/show/about.aspx) (accessed 4 Dec. 2013). On the *Totem* homepage is an image of a lithe dancer emerging with his hoops from the primordial depths of a lily pond. See [www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/totem/default.aspx](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/totem/default.aspx) (accessed 4 Dec. 2013). The character is identified as 'Amerindian' elsewhere on the company's website and has apparently been played by various hoop dance champions.

world, is a mode of embodied pedagogy, a genealogy, an ecological practice that connects the dancer with the land and its peoples.<sup>4</sup> Like various other indigenous performance traditions, it is also a livelihood strategy, imbricated in a complex circuit of competitions, with a committed community of performers and audiences who nourish and innovate the form.

Considered in this fuller context, the photograph poses a critical question if we insist that such representations are intrinsically exotic. In Graham Huggan's words, 'How is their exoticism coded, and in whose interests does it serve?' (2001, p. 13). Can we assume, as some critics do, that those who enact their indigeneity in eye-catching ways are inevitably trapped in their own objectification, perhaps in a bid to make their art commercially viable by appealing to non-indigenous interests? Huggan's work is instructive here because it implicates the spectator in the spectacle. He argues that 'the exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent *quality* to be found "in" certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them' (ibid.). Produced in that mode, cultural difference accrues commodity value, presenting both opportunities and concerns for indigenous societies as they become increasingly enmeshed in global circuits of capital and power at different scales. This situation conditions how, when, where and to what extent people can be indigenous through their practices, and what is invested, or excluded, in the process.

The chapters in this volume take up such issues through contextualised studies of the performances and cultural idioms used to express, and sometimes delimit, indigeneity in various parts of the Americas. We have begun our introduction with the spectre of exoticism to suggest that the concepts of commodity and spectacle are constructed dialogically, (re)produced through interpersonal exchange, cross-cut by cultural expectations and subject to historical contingencies. While the asymmetrical power structures of imperialism have long circumscribed the ways in which indigenous peoples in many parts of the world can represent themselves, the commodification and spectacularisation of their cultural and aesthetic practices have seldom escaped contestation or produced stable results. The two-day symposium, 'Recasting Commodity and Spectacle in the Indigenous Americas', held in November 2012 as the starting point for this book, was designed to revisit the dynamics of such processes in light of the intensified international circulation of indigenous performance in recent decades. This phenomenon is evident not just in the

4 Alex shared his views on hoop dancing in a series of conversations with us during his five-day visit to London in April 2013 to work with Indigeneity in the Contemporary World project researchers. For an edited video recording of some of these conversations and footage of his dance practice, visit <https://vimeo.com/72261874> (accessed 4 Dec. 2013).

arts – notably via festival circuits – but also in other realms of (multi)cultural production, including tourism, the heritage sector and state-endorsed mega-events such as Olympic opening ceremonies (see Gilbert, 2014).

From our vantage point in London, the decision to focus on the Americas was at once an effort to bring together in dialogue scholars working on indigeneity in different language areas, and a testament to the particularly potent brand of indigenous activism that has arisen in the region, above all in Latin America. Indigenous peoples in various parts of the globe have been organising against discrimination from at least as far back as the 1960s, but indigeneity has only developed as a significant force in global politics with the widespread indigenous mobilisations that began in the 1990s in places such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Mexico and the Amazon Basin. In addition to specific local grievances and demands, these protests were prompted by the emergence of new supranational discourses of cultural and collective rights spearheaded by the United Nations and (more contentiously) the World Trade Organisation. Like their counterparts elsewhere, these Latin American movements, though heterogeneous, have commonly recruited cultural difference, or indigenous particularity, to articulate the territorial, linguistic and spiritual rights of their constituencies, and have achieved considerable gains in the fields of constitutional reform and jurisprudence (Warren and Jackson, 2002, p. 13). In tandem with social justice, environmental activism has been a key rallying point for trans-local alliances. The rampant commodification of nature in indigenous territories, which shows its ugliest faces through mining and deforestation, has met with especially fierce local critiques, questioning the benefits of *laissez-faire* economics and neoliberal governance. These developments, in a region rich in the natural resources sought by multinational capital, have generated a renewed interest in the global reach of indigeneity and its specific purchase in contemporary social, economic, political, cultural and environmental debates.

Recent scholarship of neoliberal multiculturalism in the Americas has drawn attention to the pitfalls of coopting culture for capital's benefit, supporting a system of dominance that has long held indigenous subjects marginalised within nation-states. In the *Expediency of Culture*, George Yúdice theorises the notion of 'culture-as-resource' (2003, p. 1), positing that artistic and cultural projects are increasingly mobilised by a neoliberal logic; utilitarian in nature, they are designed to respond to broader economic and political agendas dictated by transnational institutions and developmentalist organisations. In sum, he argues that the reduced role of the state in social provision has made it the purview of culture to meet the deficit. Yúdice's claim is that 'globalization has accelerated the transformation of everything into resource' (p. 28), and that in this equation culture has become the weapon with which disenfranchised groups may battle for equality on the grounds of difference. 'These actors', he

writes, 'have put a premium on culture, defined in myriad ways, a resource already targeted for exploitation by capital (e.g., in the media, consumerism, and tourism), and a foundation for resistance against the ravages of that very same economic system' (p. 6). Significantly, though, Yúdice's analysis falls short of considering the full potential of performance-based art forms to contest the straightforward commodification of culture in innovative, ludic and strategic ways. John and Jean Comaroff's *Ethnicity Inc.* (2009), which considers Native American cultural commodities alongside their African counterparts under the provocative rubric of a global ethnic brand with specific local articulations, likewise tends to overlook the phenomenological thickness of performance as a complex relational process.

A brief sideways glance at ethnological spectacle at the turn of the 20th century shows that indigenous performers have a long history of subverting the commodity relations in which they are entangled, by choice or coercion. At the Louisiana Purchase Exposition held in St Louis, Missouri, in 1904, for instance, a group of Kwakwaka'wakw and Nuu-chah-nulth performers recruited from Vancouver Island conspired to fake a cannibalism scene as part of a demonstration of their cultural traditions, to the horror of some 20,000 spectators, but then resurrected their victim (a crafted doll-like replica of an African boy) after being told they would be charged with murder (O'Bonsawin, 2012, pp. 479–81). Microhistories of other ethnological shows – in the sense of small-scale histories that illuminate larger questions (see Ginzburg, 1993) – likewise reveal that indigenous participants had strategic investments in the entertainments they enacted. Paige Raibmon has found that public performance functioned as 'cultural tradition, modern labour, and political protest' for an earlier Kwakwaka'wakw troupe who used their international platform at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 to stage a version of a dance outlawed in Canada due to a government ban on potlatch ceremonies (2000, p. 189). Wild West Shows and related 'frontier' genres such as rodeo have also been excavated as porous zones where skilled performers negotiated the terms of their public appearances, sometimes crossing boundaries within the hierarchies that structured their social milieux (see Kelm, 2007; Kasson, 2000). Such examples should caution us against judging the political valence of indigenous spectacles in advance, even when the circumstances of their production seem weighted towards nakedly commercial ends. Margaret Werry's study of tourism, race and performance across more than a century in (and in relation to) New Zealand traces a long line of Māori involvement in state-making spectacles that could serve as a stimulus for thinking about indigenous agency elsewhere. Werry concludes that we should understand spectacle as 'a productive and dynamic force rather than dismiss it as reification or delusion'. 'Spectacle', she adds, 'is machinic rather than monumental, multivocal rather than monologic, not

hegemonically totalizing but a mobile cultural formation vulnerable to the intransigence and momentum of the subjects it produces' (2011, p. 132). In this formulation, spectacle can be a resource for the disenfranchised even as it seems to uphold the interests of the powerful. What is commodity to one person may be heritage to another, or even a kind of insurance against future oblivion – an echo, or a vision, of the adaptive resilience that Gunn Allen metaphorised in her early account of the hoop dancer transcending time.

With some important exceptions, the existing scholarly literature on commodity and spectacle in relation to indigenous peoples does not sufficiently theorise the transformations that are taking place in the arts and at the grassroots level.<sup>5</sup> Performers and communities alike are self-consciously rearticulating their identities (with an emphasis on the plural and the provisional) amid changing public discourses on indigeneity, migrancy and belonging, and shifting economic and political climates, both locally and globally; our challenge is to keep pace in the theoretical realm. This volume seeks to contribute to debates about such cultural transformations and their various entanglements with commerce and capital, typically in what James Clifford calls 'a dialectics of innovation and constraint' (2013, p. 32). The performance practices discussed in the following pages – in the realms of film, theatre, photography, music, museology, ritual, festival, carnival and political protest – invite us to reexamine indigeneity's distinctive relationships to economies of display and commodity circulation, and to address the historically contingent contours of indigenous performance and identity formation in different scenarios. How is heritage reinvested, or divested, as it now circulates as product for local, national or international audiences? To what degree is spectacle as a performative (and at times exoticist) idiom remodelled in the hands of indigenous artists and practitioners? How do the dynamics of consumption pertaining to indigenous performance produce particular affective communities? The 13 chapters gathered herein offer a variety of disciplinary methodologies to index the transactions that take place between indigenous subjects, artists and communities and national and supranational entities. The authors register a significant amount of agency among indigenous performers and cultural brokers in their negotiations with the state, distributors, producers and audiences, despite the limited recognition or acceptance of this fact among sceptical onlookers. The chapters also crucially acknowledge the thorny terrain of cross-cultural misperception, the long histories of appropriation of selective elements of indigeneity according to the interests of national elites, and the legacy of harmful stereotypes to this day.

5 Like Werry's work, these exceptions tend to come from interdisciplinary performance studies and they gather force and authority by tracing the historical roots of contemporary practices. See, for instance, Balme (2006), Shea Murphy (2007) and Dueck (2013).

Contemporary indigenous artistic productions often strive to rectify these negative portrayals and their enduring repercussions in public life. For Native Americans, the fantasy Indian of classical Hollywood film, invariably dressed in Plains costume and sacrificed for the frontier nation's better interest, is a case in point. Revisionist approaches to cultural history have analysed the development of such romanticised or vilified stereotypes, drawing attention to the agency, albeit limited, of the Native performers and image-makers involved in their production and highlighting indigenous influence in artistic circles that have long disregarded it. Michelle H. Raheja's *Reservation Reelism* (2011) is groundbreaking in this vein, excavating the layered histories of Native participation and dissent in the Hollywood film industry. Her chapter for this volume considers the efficacy of film aesthetics in communicating indigenous knowledges and rebutting colonialist discourses. In so doing, it reminds us of what is at stake in the perpetuation of racist stereotypes and myths of reconciliation, but also alerts us to the pressure on Native filmmakers in the United States to contest dominant historiographies and 'carry the burden of undoing over five hundred years of misrepresentation' (chapter 1, this volume). Raheja's protest against the foundational myth of Thanksgiving, epitomised in the annual rehearsal of a peaceful dinner between pilgrims and Indians, acknowledges the continued manipulation of indigenous history for nationalist ends.

In Latin America, the appropriation and mythologising of indigenous cultures by national elites found dominant expression through the nostalgic philosophy of *indigenismo*, employed to extoll, reify and arbitrate the meanings of indigeneity, as Michael Gonzales's chapter amply documents. Mexico's long history of *indigenismo*, which, he argues, pre-dates the Revolution of 1910–20, and the more consolidated implementation of *indigenista* policy subsequently, has had profound influence on the parameters of indigeneity in the country. Gonzales charts the changing attitudes of the state to its indigenous citizens by analysing the pageantry of two spectacular centennial celebrations: the first, the centenary of independence celebrated under Porfirio Díaz in 1910, and the second, in 1921, in its post-Revolutionary incarnation, under President Obregón. The selective elevation of some elements of indigenous culture as representative of the nation-state also operates in Bolivia, glimpsed here through Ximena Córdova Oviedo's analysis of the official rhetoric and conventions of the Oruro Carnival. Córdova argues that while institutional and nationalist discourses about this event retain troubling remnants of *indigenismo* and, bolstered by UNESCO



heritage discourses, continue to promote the *mestizo*<sup>6</sup> as the true embodiment of Bolivia's hybridity, the Carnival has become a locus for a new representation of indigeneity enacted through the rural Anata parades that descend upon the city from the surrounding countryside. This development has accompanied major shifts in the country's political climate, which has made it possible to revalue indigeneity. Both chapters historicise the changing values awarded to indigeneity by the nation-state, which have led to the commodification and misappropriation of some aspects of cultural difference, and the dismissal of others.

Gabriela Zamorano Villarreal's contribution to the volume takes up the topic of Bolivia's current debates on indigeneity, driven in large part by the transformations that have occurred at the level of political governance with the election of the country's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, in 2006. Zamorano Villarreal dissects the rich field of Bolivian indigenous video, as practised through the Plan Nacional Indígena Originario de Comunicación Audiovisual (National Plan of Indigenous Communication), in relation to existing visual repertoires of indigeneity in the region, the system's innovative distribution tactics, and the periodically conflicting interests and discourses that are brought to bear on the ways in which the videos are circulated and introduced. She argues that the epistemological and methodological innovations fostered by the Plan Nacional at the level of production and distribution are nonetheless defined by 'structural and historical conditions moulding how mediamakers see themselves and their realities' (chapter 4, this volume). This attention to the circuits through which indigenous videos reach their different audiences emphasises the materialities that inflect spectatorship as an important element of image-making.

Museums have long been key sites of mediation that conveniently package indigenous material cultures and realities as commodities for consumption by non-indigenous spectators. The repositioning and reframing of indigeneity in recent decades, however, has also been evident in the field of museology as institutions grapple with their former role as conspirators in 'freezing cultures behind glass' (Zittlau, chapter 5, this volume). Zittlau's contribution discusses how contemporary museum spaces, in this instance the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C., are continually haunted by

6 The term *mestizo* is a shifting ethnic and ideological category denoting people of mixed indigenous and European heritage. *Mestizaje*, its counterpart discourse, was employed throughout much of Latin America as an assimilationist and homogenising rhetoric in tandem with *indigenista* policies. As these words are in common usage, they will not be italicised from this point. Other regularly used words mentioned here, such as *indigenismo* and *huayno*, are also italicised initially in the main text but not thereafter. In subsequent chapters such words as *indígenas*, *anata*, *cholo*, *coraza*, *Kriol*, *cargo* and *barrios* are also italicised on first in-text usage only.

earlier essentialist ideas of indigenous cultures, narrated through 19th-century ethnology and diorama exhibits. Her interpretation of Nora Naranjo-Morse's performative sculpture, 'Always Becoming' (2007), shows how performance has the potential to displace antiquated economies of display with a processual aesthetics that stages the search for contemporary Native identities. The sculptor's attempt to displace the trope of the 'museum Indian' invites viewers to consider material objects as things in dynamic relationship with each other and with the social and physical environments in which they exist, thereby subtly critiquing the commodification and consumption of cultural production today.

In his introduction to *The Social Life of Things* (1986), Arjun Appadurai argues that value is constructed through global market operations and that global processes of commodification may (inadvertently?) engender new social relations that operate in anti-imperialist interests, empowering the previously dispossessed. What he terms different 'regimes in value' operate upon objects and artefacts through exchange, thus creating commodities of cultural goods (p. 4). Appadurai contends that material objects acquire meanings 'in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things' (p. 5). Sarah Stolte's chapter precisely unearths the trajectories of production and circulation of mid-20th century photographic postcards of Ho-Chunk subjects in the Wisconsin Dells area. Her study demonstrates how Ho-Chunk found in their poses for the camera the possibility to carve a space of economic empowerment predicated on the rising profile and commercial success of Hollywood Westerns. Stolte analyses the performative nature of commodity, showing the ways in which Ho-Chunk capitalised, quite literally, on the phantasmic, homogenised Indian circulated in this genre by way of the silver screen, reappropriating its iconography to engage in the new tourist economy. By conducting an archaeology of these photo-postcards, Stolte illuminates the resonance of the images today, arguing that they become 'animated' through consumption. In her analysis, it becomes clear that 'the diversion of commodities' – in this case the Hollywood Indian – 'from their predestined paths' (Appadurai, 1986, p. 26) may offer potential rewards for indigenous performers able to harness touristic interests for their own economic empowerment.

Many critics have noted the commodification of authenticity that drives indigenous tourism, highlighting the uneven power relations performed in its characteristic scenarios of cross-cultural encounter. *Ethnicity Inc.* offers a broad and fascinating overview of the ways in which indigenous branding plays into the contradictory logics of the neoliberal marketplace, leaving marginalised cultures susceptible to the vagaries of consumer capital (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009).

Nevertheless, we should be wary of the assumption that cultural tourism is only ever a trap, for either tourists or the communities that host them. A number of recent indigenous initiatives in this arena tap the embodied energies of performance to educate non-indigenous publics, reinvigorate artistic traditions and instil pride in local cultures, while channelling income into individual and communal needs. Moreover, as Andrew Canessa notes in observing the complex 'choreographies' of commodification and authenticity in Latin American tourism, 'power is never exercised unambiguously and [...] images can change, spaces can open up, and power relations can be challenged by the very tropes that set them up in the first place' (2012, p. 110). These observations also readily pertain to cultural and intercultural commerce beyond the world of tourism. Several chapters in this book recognise the power of indigenous artists and cultural brokers to adapt spectacles and circuits of consumption to their own needs and desires, thereby complicating the idea that indigenous spectacle is uniquely interested in satiating non-indigenous appetites for exotic Otherness. In this equation, capitalism is typically viewed as a juggernaut that predetermines commodity relations and militates against indigenous agency. Taking issue with this perspective, James Butterworth's assessment of commercial *huayno*, a highly popular Andean musical genre in Peru, positions the labour of indigenous entertainers as instrumentally fostering subaltern visibility and empowerment. His analysis demonstrates that the idioms of *huayno* spectacle are oriented towards 'internal' communities, forging new forms of indigenous citizenship based on the consumption of hybrid (urban and rural) musical aesthetics. Butterworth disputes the idea that spectacle is about performing for cultural outsiders, offering instead an interpretation of the economic and symbolic gains that *huayno* divas harvest through performance. While the new terrains of citizenship generated by this genre and its attendant distribution circuits are not free from neoliberal manoeuvring, they clearly signal the limitations of approaches that position indigeneity as straightforwardly oppositional to capitalism.

Genner Llanes-Ortiz also offers a fresh perspective on the workings of spectacle in his chapter on the performance of Maya corporeality during Maya Day celebrations in Belize. In this annual cultural festival, Mayanness is celebrated through the staging of daily chores, wherein the indigenous 'cultural muscle' is communicated through the language of spectacle, here used as a 'recruiting device' that engenders community dialogue about tradition (chapter 8, this volume). Quotidian tasks, including corn grinding and firewood splitting, accrue value as traditional cultural practices through staged competitions charged with the celebratory mood of the festival. In the broader context of Maya invisibility in Belize, Llanes-Ortiz reads these performances

as embodied strategies for working towards the cultural recognition that could deliver greater social justice.

Performative celebrations of ethnic resurgence are the subject of two other chapters in the volume. Andrew Roth-Seneff's study of the P'urhépecha New Year in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, illustrates how the interpenetrating realms of civil society and state legislation have brought about a subaltern public sphere in which the annual performance of P'urhépecha ethnicity resignifies previously commodified performance practices in a new economy of reciprocity. His close attention to the symbolism and iconography mobilised in the New Year celebrations demonstrates that colonial structures of Christian ritual have been transformed and revitalised as part of an evolving ethnic subalternity. For his part, Sergio Miguel Huarcaya examines different uses of, and stakes in, the Fiesta del Coraza in Ecuador among two separate populations, mestizo and indigenous. His interpretation of the differently encoded renditions of this Fiesta, in light of the reinvestment in indigenous identity and culture among Kichwa activists in Otavalo, demonstrates the crucial role that performance plays in community power relations, instrumentalised to contest national imaginaries and avow ethnic allegiances. This finding resonates with Néstor García Canclini's assertion that 'identity is a construct, but the artistic, folkloric, and media narratives that shape it are realized and transformed within sociohistorical conditions that cannot be reduced to their mise-en-scène. Identity is theater *and* politics, performance *and* action' (2001, p. 96).

Concerns over the policing of indigeneity and endorsement of its legal and cultural value run through a number of the chapters in the book. In the legal domain, Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez shows how existing cartographic mechanisms to map indigenous territories in Nicaragua play into the stereotype of the 'noble savage'. The legal framework activated in order to protect such territories from transnational and nation-state encroachment places what she terms a 'grid of intelligibility' on indigeneity, authenticating the mythologisation of indigenous peoples as innately of the land. The *Mayagna (Sumo) Community of Awas Tingni v. Nicaragua* judgment offers a compelling case study through which to explore how relationships to territory and environment are commodified under neoliberal governance and rights discourses, presenting 'indigeneity as a form of human capital' (chapter 11, this volume). In other words, legalistic discourses of indigeneity necessitate a performance of identity (to attain access to land) that relegates indigenous peoples' difference to the realm of the natural and frustrates their aspirations to modern forms of resource management. Yvette Nolan's meditation on her own experience as an Aboriginal Canadian director and dramaturg calls attention to a comparable economy of expectation operating in the arts, which, in her context, makes its effects felt in the funding and reception of indigenous

theatre, particularly when it dares to adapt Shakespeare's texts. Her discussion of the complex manufacturing of indigenouness expected in such adaptations – just enough to make the production recognisable as Native, but not so much as to make it untranslatable to a general audience – asks that indigenous theatre be allowed to develop its agenda, performative methodologies and praxis 'on its own terms', without the arbitrating (and often uninformed) assessments of cultural critics on the grounds of authenticity.

If this book's central concern is the agency of indigenous artists and subjects, seen as a weapon against the codification of an 'authentic' subaltern identity, then the instrumentality of place in recasting commodity and spectacle likewise deserves a mention. According to Coll Thrush, 'the idea that particular locations have both identity and agency is central to indigenous epistemologies of place, in which sites not only have meaning but volition, acting upon the lives of human (and other) peoples' (2011, p. 54). Selena Couture's contribution to this book deconstructs the site of Klahowya Village in Stanley Park, Vancouver, to reveal it as a place where multiple histories, memories and investments coalesce and are constantly at play with each other in the redevelopment of a community tourism venture. Her evocation of this palimpsestic landscape is a powerful reminder of the indigenous ghosts, real and imagined, that haunt the places and performance practices discussed during the London symposium and in this book. Several authors employ a rhetoric of haunting in their chapters, in relation to the colonialist visual repertoire that contemporary artists often seek to dispute. Raheja talks of the haunting 'afterlife of Native American images', and Zittlau applies Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology (*hantologie*) to her analysis of outmoded museology practices. Other contributors make reference to the spectre of Native pasts more obliquely, often in reference to the Hollywood Indian or 'Dead Indians' (King, 2012) that so frequently subtend North American cultural imaginaries. It is fitting in this context to conclude our introduction with a discussion of how London, too, seems haunted by indigenous ghosts.

To organise a conversation on the indigenous Americas in London has, of course, political implications, which did not go unnoticed by the symposium participants. The city's role as imperial hub for the largest empire in history duly prompted an engagement with the myths that have sanitised colonial narratives of dispossession. As Michelle Raheja reminded us in her keynote address, the first day of the event coincided with Thanksgiving celebrations in the United States, providing an apt moment at which to explore the offensive redfacing that is staged annually during this national holiday, and the practice's racist underpinnings as a rendition of benign British settlement in the 'New World'. Raheja's intervention urges us to remember the shared histories forged by European colonialism and the ways in which they connect indigenous

communities in many parts of the world to London to this day. Coll Thrush's work on indigenous London<sup>7</sup> likewise asks us to acknowledge and investigate the indigenous lives lived, and sometimes lost, in this city of empire and to recognise the crucial role that indigenous servants, envoys, diplomats, translators and performers have played in its historical development.

Intersections in the cultural, economic and political trajectories of Britain and the indigenous Americas are equally pertinent today. Given the impact of London-listed mining and gas companies that intervene in indigenous territories, there is an urgent necessity to disseminate informed accounts that recognise the trade and migration networks sustaining transnational flows of natural, manufactured and artistic commodities. Chadwick Allen advocates this kind of contextualising as critical to a model of analytics he terms 'trans-indigenous', which 'locates itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local, while remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global' (2012, p. xix). As home to various diasporic groupings of indigenous denizens linked to distant parts of the world, London figures on both of these geographical axes, and functions as a site where indigeneity manifests in multiple modes. There is a sizeable community here of Māori and other Pacific Islanders, for example, which boasts innovative and high-profile artists whose contributions to the city's cultural matrix often interweave art with diplomacy on behalf of their countries of origin. Cultural festivals and commemorations have also become common platforms for the embodied expression of diasporic indigeneity. In this vein, recent Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) events organised by London's Mexican community have featured Maya practices and philosophies, and there is a vibrant indigenous strand to the Latin American music scene. The Origins Festival of First Nations and the Native Spirit Film Festival extend these activities with an exclusive focus on indigenous works, local and international.

Visiting artists also contribute to such networks through the museum sector, where opportunities are gradually opening for indigenous peoples to be involved in the interpretation of their histories and artefacts. The National Portrait Gallery's 2013 exhibition, 'George Catlin: American Indian Portraits', co-curated by Dakota art historian Stephanie Pratt, exemplified this trend with creative interventions by Cheyenne/Arapaho conceptual artist Edgar Heap of Birds and Mohawk filmmaker Shelley Niro to counterpoint Catlin's romanticised paintings. In a similar spirit six months later, in a raw warehouse gallery overlooking the river Thames, the Indigeneity in the Contemporary World project hosted 'EcoCentrix: Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Acts', a major

7 Thrush is currently preparing a monograph, *Indigenous London: Native Travellers at the Heart of Empire*, for Yale University Press; the book traces histories of indigenous peoples' presence in London over the last 500 years.

performance-based exhibition drawn from First Nations communities in the Americas, Australia, the Pacific Islands and South Africa.<sup>8</sup> As part of the core team mounting this event, we were only too aware of the ways in which our own respective work, as curator (Gilbert) and film associate (Gleghorn), had the power to mediate public perceptions of indigeneity. What helped the exhibition to negotiate the fraught legacies of commodity and spectacle as conceptual paradigms for circulating indigenous arts in museum and gallery spaces was the extensive participation, in the lead-up to the event and on the ground in London, of so many of the designers, choreographers, performers, filmmakers, musicians and artists whose works we had the privilege to feature. Among the exhibits, Tahltan performance artist Peter Morin's 'Cultural Graffiti in London' (2013) conveyed most profoundly a sense of the indigenous inhabitations – past and present, fleeting and sustained, visible and invisible – that indelibly haunt the city. This installation of photographs, video footage and recorded sound showed Morin singing the Tahltan songs of his homelands in Canada to British landmarks, including the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace and Big Ben. Juxtaposed with these records were images and sounds of similar performances at lesser-known monuments such as Kwakwaka'wakw carver Mungo Martin's 'Totem Pole' in Great Windsor Park and the statue of Pocahontas (Powhatan) at Gravesend, on the Thames estuary, where she is thought to have been buried. Morin envisioned his work not as entertainment for audiences, but rather as an intervention enacting indigenous forms of conversation and nation-to-nation contact with historical figures and ancestors.<sup>9</sup> 'Tagging' these different London sites with his voice in acts of invisible graffiti constituted an assertion of cultural resilience, which often ended with the statement, 'We are still here'. During the exhibition, Morin performed two more instalments in the series: the first bore witness to the life of an Inuit child buried at St Olave's Cathedral in central London in 1577; the second took a new form, a button blanket 'bombing' to shroud a statue of Christopher Columbus gifted to the city by Spain in 1992 with the following

8 'EcoCentrix: Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Acts' ran from 24 October–10 November 2013 at Bargehouse in London's Southbank arts precinct. Funded by the European Research Council, this multi-arts exhibition featured films, live performances, digital and sound installations and crafted artefacts by more than 40 indigenous performance makers. Other members of the core exhibition team were assistant curator and codesigner Dani Phillipson; curatorial assistants Sergio Huaracaya, Genner Llanes-Ortiz (Yucatec Maya) and Dylan Robinson (Stö:lö); and production assistant Rose Harriman. The Indigeneity in the Contemporary World project also coproduced the third biennial Origins Festival of First Nations, staged in 2013 in conjunction with the 'EcoCentrix' exhibition.

9 This information derives from discussions we had with Peter Morin and Stö:lö scholar Dylan Robinson during Morin's three-week residency as visiting fellow with the Indigeneity in the Contemporary World project from 8–29 June 2013.





*Figure 1. Peter Morin performing outside Buckingham Palace as part of his 'Cultural Graffiti in London' series, 2013. Photo: Dylan Robinson.*

inscription: 'dedicated to all the peoples of the Americas in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of encounter between the two worlds'.

Such performances intercept hegemonic discourses with artistic cunning, overturning the hierarchies of power and privilege that underpin the naturalised categories of imperial centre and indigenous periphery. More broadly, the emerging trans-indigenous cultural sphere in London, and the hidden histories it indexes, offers counter-narratives to official renditions of place, urging Britons (of all complexions) to entertain the idea that the nation's capital has been shaped by indigenous lives since at least as far back as 1501. Manifest in various and sometimes surprising ways, this subaltern presence provides an antidote to anodyne and reconciliatory accounts of the past that simultaneously renounce Britain's responsibility in (neo)colonial violence, and erase indigenous agency and participation in global affairs over time.

The artistic interventions outlined also challenge us to examine the ways in which indigeneity is (and can be) conceptualised in Britain, as a country that has emerged from many waves of conquest in its early history and which does not have a definitive rendition of first-comers and invaders. To put it simply, who are the British indigenes? Is there need or reason to develop a definition of indigeneity in this nation? Or does the process of thinking about Britain in relation to the concept demand modifications to its underlying narratives of origin, priority and rights of belonging? Beyond the occasional press article



revealing ‘lost’ or ‘uncontacted’ tribes, or documenting resistance of indigenous communities against any number of multinationals in Latin America, or Canada, there is very little general knowledge among Britons about indigenous cultures. The task of contributing to the conversation in this country about the meaning and provenance of indigeneity seems all the more pressing in light of the fact that the term has been coopted by proponents of far right politics, notably the British National Party and the English Defence League, who disingenuously equate it with whiteness and Christian Britain to bolster their racist anti-immigration rhetoric. The circulation of this connotation of indigenous through the media, despite critics’ attempts to highlight the fallacy of the BNP’s argument, has further compromised informed debate about the category among the British, with many people disregarding the significance of historical disenfranchisement to most definitions of the term. As colleagues James Mackay and David Stirrup wrote in *The Guardian’s* Comment is Free (2010), ‘The co-opting of the term “indigenous” and its associated rights’ among British nationalists ‘is a cynical attempt to legitimise the targeting of minority ethnic groups’.

At this conjunction, where issues regarding heritage, first coming and settlement are far from resolved in Britain, recognising and reflecting upon indigeneity’s negotiated status in comparative terms, as this book does, seems an essential strategy through which to anchor responsible local debate. Performance, in its complex intermeshing of embodied politics and regimes of affect, might just channel these frustrated discussions in productive directions, offering fresh ways to engage estranged populations in dialogue, and to approach entangled and painful histories. The metaphysics of the hoop dance are worth recalling in this endeavour insofar as they suggest a rhythm for moving forward while ‘living in motion’ with the past.

## Bibliography

- Allen, C. (2012) *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).
- Appadurai, A. (1986) ‘Introduction: commodities and the politics of value’, in A. Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 3–63.
- Balme, C. (2006) *Pacific Performances: Theatricality and Cross-Cultural Encounter in the South Seas* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Canessa, A. (2012) ‘Gender, indigeneity, and the performance of authenticity in Latin American tourism’, *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 39, no. 6, pp. 109–115.

- Clifford, J. (2013) *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Comaroff, J.L. and J. Comaroff (2009) *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press).
- Dueck, B. (2013) *Musical Intimacies & Indigenous Imaginaries* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press).
- García Canclini, N. (2001) *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).
- Gilbert, H. (2014) “‘Let the games begin’: pageants, protests, indigeneity (1968–2010)”, in E. Fischer-Lichte, T. Jost and S.I. Jain (eds.) *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures* (New York, NY: Routledge), pp. 156–75.
- Ginzburg, C. (1993) ‘Microhistory: two or three things that I know about it’, trans. J. Tedeschi and A. Tedeschi, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 10–35.
- Gunn Allen, P. (1986) *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press).
- (1997) ‘Hoop Dancer’, in *Life is a Fatal Disease: Collected Poems 1962–1995* (Albuquerque, NM: West End Press).
- Huggan, G. (2001) *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge).
- Kasson, J. (2000) *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang).
- Kelm, M. (2007) ‘Riding into place: contact zones, rodeo, and hybridity in the Canadian West 1900–1970’, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 107–32.
- King, T. (2012) *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Toronto, ON: Doubleday Canada).
- McKay, J. and D. Stirrup (2010) ‘There is no such thing as an “indigenous” Briton’, *The Guardian*, 20 Dec., available at: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/20/indigenous-britons-far-right](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/20/indigenous-britons-far-right) (accessed 4 Dec. 2013).
- O’Bonsawin, C. (2012) “‘There will be no law that will come against us’: an important episode of Indigenous resistance and activism in Olympic history”, in H. Jefferson Lenskyi and S. Wagg (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Olympic Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 474–86.

- Raheja, M.H. (2011) *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press).
- Raibmon, P. (2000) 'Theatres of contact: the Kwakwaka'wakw meet colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World's Fair', *The Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 81, no. 2, pp. 157–90.
- Shea Murphy, J. (2007) *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).
- Thrush, C. (2011) 'Hauntings as histories: Indigenous ghosts and the urban past', in C. Thrush and C. Boyd (eds.) *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture & History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press), pp. 54–81.
- (2014) 'The iceberg and the cathedral: encounter, entanglement, and isuma in Inuit London', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 53, Jan., pp. 59–79, available at: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=9175916> (accessed 3 March 2014).
- Warren, K.B. and J.E. Jackson (2002) 'Introduction: studying indigenous activism in Latin America', in K.B. Warren and J.E. Jackson (eds.) *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press), pp. 1–46.
- Werry, M. (2011) *The Tourist State: Performing Leisure, Liberalism and Race in New Zealand* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).
- Yúdice, G. (2003) *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NE and London: Duke University Press).